

School Evaluation Report

Indianapolis Metropolitan High School

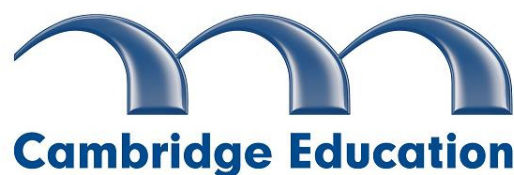
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Dates of evaluation: May 19 - 20, 2011

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Part 1: The School Context

Information about the school:

Indianapolis Metropolitan High School is a public charter school which serves 316 students in grades 9 through 12. Of these students, 27.2 percent are special education students. There are 6 English language learners. Approximately 71 percent of the students are Black, 17 percent are White, 9 percent are Multiracial and 2 percent are Hispanic. There is universal Title 1 eligibility.

Student attendance last academic year was 87.5 percent, well below the State average of 95.9 percent.

The school did not make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) again in 2010, with only 4 of the 13 categories being met. Black students and students overall achieved AYP through Safe Harbor in English language arts. Students eligible for free and reduced price lunch achieved AYP through Safe Harbor in mathematics. No group of students managed the 95 percent attendance rate for either test. The graduation rate met the AYP target. At 35.48 percent, the proportion of students passing the English 10 End of Course Assessment (ECA) was very low and compares with the State average of 64.07 percent. Results in Algebra I were even lower, 2.75 percent compared with the State average of 62.83 percent.

The 2010 four year graduation rate of 61.4 percent was well below the Statewide figure of 84.5 percent. Nearly 10 percent of students graduated with an Honors Diploma, compared with 30.5 percent of students across the State.

The school has adopted the transformation model for the School Improvement Grant (SIG). The principal appointed to lead the school through the transformation left part way through the school year. An interim principal was in place at the time of the evaluation visit.

Part 2: Overview

The areas of the school that have been improved:

- Faculty appointments have been made in line with the SIG application.
- The addition of art, music and Spanish has broadened the curriculum and provided greater access to honors programs.
- The school developed and implemented a rubric for describing teacher effectiveness.
- There is a strong sense of dedication to mission from the staff.
- Students are being held more accountable.
- There is a greater focus on academics, with increasing rigor and challenge for students.
- Interim student data is indicating some improved outcomes.
- There is an increasing use of data to target additional support for students.
- The Teacher Advancement Program (TAP) is underway, and the school is well placed to build on its experiences from this year.
- There has been improvement in attendance rates as a result of greater focus on the data.
- Teachers are using an increasing range of strategies to engage students in learning.
- Student motivation to succeed has increased, with raised aspirations for the future.
- READ 180 is underway, and this is supporting targeted student growth.
- Plans are in place to broaden the range of literacy interventions available to support a greater range of learning needs.
- There is a core of very invested parents.
- Family nights have taken place, providing a focus for strengthening home school relationships.
- Some teachers have developed effective strategies for minimizing the impact of irregular student attendance.
- The school makes extensive use of external tutors.
- The school employs a number of informal strategies to get individual students into school.
- Effective links with the community provide many opportunities for student internships.
- The school is putting an extended calendar into place.
- The school has utilized a range of community partners to provide support for families.

- Significant, positive changes have occurred to the focus and structure of the curriculum.
- The school has increased opportunities for students to provide feedback on how things are working for them.
- More rigorous monitoring and analysis of referral and behavior data is helping the school to identify patterns and root causes more effectively.
- There is a shift to greater emphasis on positive behaviors and rewards for students.
- Increased collaboration between teachers is producing greater consistency within the curriculum.

The areas of the school that remain to be improved:

- There is still not a strong enough imperative for some students to attend and to be successful.
- Not all students have developed intrinsic motivations to take full responsibility for their own learning and behavior.
- Test results, including participation rates, have to increase significantly, as do graduation rates.
- Attendance rates need to rise considerably.
- Staff members are not universally sure what the vision is for the future development of the school.
- Job embedded professional development has not occurred in a sufficiently focused and systematic manner to drive improvements.
- While learning objectives are often present, they are not consistently, clear and measurable, with progress towards them checked during and at the end of the class.
- Strategies that require all students to engage intellectually with the learning intentions of the lesson are not used universally.
- The use of data is not yet leading to extensive differentiation and targeted scaffolding in the classroom.
- There are limited school-wide strategies adopted to minimize the impact of irregular student attendance.
- There is not yet a clearly defined, faculty wide understanding of what constitutes high quality learning.
- Differentiated growth expectations for students are not clearly defined in order to act as success criteria.
- The planned parent centre is not yet operational.
- Some parents remain hard to reach and have yet to develop into full partners in their child's education.
- There remain opportunities for parents and community members to be extensively engaged in aspects of decision making with the school.
- Access to technology for students has not developed as planned.
- External partners have not been utilized to provide the impact intended.
- Not all staff are confident that they understand the purpose, expectations and inter-relationships of all the different components of the school.
- There are limited formalized 'safety nets' for getting students into school and keeping them there.
- Expectations for student behaviors are implemented inconsistently.

Part 3: Main Findings

Overall Evaluation: The school's overall performance and the extent to which the SIG funding has resulted in significant improvement:

This school has made unsatisfactory improvement.

The school has made very significant improvement in recent months, following a less productive start to the academic year. The first part of the year had seen little development towards the actions outlined in the SIG application and some deterioration in the climate of the school. However, developments have now accelerated, particularly since the departure of the principal. Since that point, there has been an increase in the rigor of the school's actions, with systems and structures developing that are providing a more coherent framework for the day to day work of the school, as well as school improvement actions. Staff are also working with more vigor, so that there is a positive climate for the changes taking place and those that lie ahead. There is a very strong sense of commitment to meeting the needs of the student body and dedication to maximizing their life chances.

The curriculum has been the subject of much change, with a greater focus on core content and State Standards. The school remains committed to a project based approach and the individualization that this can provide, but is concerned to prepare students for this and to utilize the methodology to a greater degree as students mature academically. The school has moved away from primary delivery through an advisory structure, although an advisory period is maintained to support broader skill and personal development for students. Staff, students and their families believe that the new structure provides for greater academic rigor and interim student data is indicating some improved outcomes. However, test results, including participation rates, have to increase significantly, as do graduation rates, if the school is to fulfill its mission for all students.

While many benefits from this period of change are evident, it is a very different approach to that adopted previously and this has resulted in some uncertainty for the staff. There remains some lack of certainty in the vision for the sustained development of the school and how its mission will be achieved in the future. Despite this, recent months have resulted in strong growth and improvement, so that the current pace of change is good. There is now a strong correlation between the intent of the SIG application and the direction of change. The school has the capacity, both through the skills of the staff and their energy and enthusiasm, to maintain this accelerated pace of growth into the years ahead.

The monies available through the SIG have broadened the curriculum available, enabling the school to offer higher level courses in the arts and languages. Plans to utilize technology have not developed as intended. The school has been able to utilize master teachers in developing and implementing a framework for evaluating teacher effectiveness and supporting growth. As a result, the school is well placed to take the next steps of moving into TAP from a secure and knowledgeable base. While support from some external turnaround partners is evident, the direct impact of embedded professional development throughout the school and in classrooms is less so. Community partnerships support the social and emotional growth of students, as well as providing opportunities for internships. Links with families have been strengthened, although there remains work to be done before all families are working in full partnership with the school. An extended calendar is in operation, although careful evaluation will be required of the impact on the faculty of a relatively short summer break before school starts again.

Commentary on SIG improvement areas:

Develop Teacher and Leader Effectiveness

The school appointed an overall school principal as outlined in the SIG application. However, after a period of little progress towards some of the elements outlined in the application, and some evident decline in the climate of the school, this principal left. An interim principal was then put in place. Since this time, the school has been stabilized and rapid improvements have been taking place. A permanent appointment, or the process to make one, is pending.

There is a strong sense of dedication to the school's mission from the staff, with a focus on meeting student needs. The advisory approach previously adopted provided a mechanism for achieving this through developing strong relationships and providing an individualized approach through project work. There is a general recognition that, while this was successful for a significant proportion of the students, it was not successful for others, with overall low test results, graduation rates and attendance. The current changes are seen as strengthening the academic component, while potentially maintaining important aspects of the advisory and project based concepts. While there is general support for the change, staff members are not universally sure what the vision for the future development of the school actually is. Furthermore, not all are confident that they understand the purpose, expectations and inter-relationships of all the different components of the school.

The SIG application recognized that traditionally, there was no connection between evaluations of teacher effectiveness and student achievement. The school developed and implemented a rubric for evaluating teacher effectiveness as outlined in the SIG application, based upon the advisory model. This has been modified in line with the structural changes that have taken place. The school's master teachers have used the framework and identified school-wide development needs, as well as those for individual teachers. Classroom visits and debriefs have been carried out by both master teachers together, helping to ensure consistency in approach as well as evaluation. The school is also well into the process for appointing mentor teachers in line with the TAP model. As a result, the school is well placed to build on its experiences from this year and implement the expectations of TAP quickly and effectively.

The school has effectively drawn upon the expertise of a turnaround partner in preparation for TAP. However, more broadly, the impact of focused, systematic job embedded professional development is less evident in driving improvement throughout the school. Nevertheless, internal support from master teachers, and increased collaboration time have underpinned developments to date. Fidelity to the TAP model should help to advance this further. However, differentiated growth expectations for students are not clearly defined in order to act as success criteria and a measure of teacher effectiveness.

Recommendations

- *Establish a shared vision for the school and how it will fulfill its mission with absolute fidelity.*
- *Develop an improvement plan that sets out the route to achieving the vision over the next two years, with success criteria, milestones and timelines.*
- *Establish success criteria for the work of master and mentor teachers and rigorously monitor progress towards them in order to ensure strong growth for teachers.*
- *Ensure that the responsibilities of the permanent principal are clearly defined with specific, measurable success criteria and that the superintendent monitors and evaluates progress towards them in a systematic and timely manner.*
- *Identify and utilize a broader range of turnaround partners to support the academic and behavioral improvements being targeted.*

Increase Learning Time and Develop Community Engagement

The school is putting an extended calendar into place, recognizing that the previous model did not allow for formal, structured additional time to overcome instructional deficits. While evaluation of the impact on summer learning loss must wait until next year, increased collaboration between faculty members is producing a more rigorous and coherent curriculum, so that the learning time available is being utilized more productively. Teachers will be compensated for the increased number of working days, but some remain concerned that reduced summer vacation time might adversely impact energy levels and stamina into the new academic year. Teachers routinely extend the learning time available to individual students by offering tutoring outside of their classes, which the students value highly. Students are now being held more accountable and their motivation to succeed has increased. For many, the increased academic rigor has raised their aspirations. There has been improvement in attendance rates as a result of this greater rigor, as well as an increased focus on the data and more consistent follow-through. Nevertheless, attendance rates still need to rise substantially.

The school is placing greater emphasis on positive behaviors and rewards for students. More rigorous monitoring and analysis of referral and behavior data is helping to identify patterns and root causes more effectively. As a result, school climate has improved, although expectations for student behaviors are not always implemented consistently. Disturbances in classrooms have fallen, resulting in more focused learning time. However, there is still not enough imperative on some students to overcome the barriers that they face, to get to school and to be successful. Not all students have developed sufficient intrinsic motivation to take full responsibility for their own learning and behavior. The school has increased opportunities for students to provide feedback on how things are working for them and what might be improved.

Staff employ a number of informal 'safety nets' to help students get into school, including picking them up from home. While many students surmount very significant barriers, including unhelpful public bus schedules, others find it too much of a challenge at times. The school has utilized a range of community partners to provide direct support for students, including health and nutrition services, which help them to remain in school and focused on their academic progress. However, there remain some difficulties which are not yet addressed fully, including child care for student mothers and fathers. Community partners also provide numerous opportunities for tutoring and mentoring, some of which are targeted to specific groups of students. Effective links with the community also provide student internships, a key feature of the school's offering.

The school has a core of very invested parents, although the planned parent centre is not yet operational. In general, parents find the school approachable and welcoming and feel encouraged to engage with it. They are kept regularly informed of developments, including student achievement, and can access grades and outstanding assignments on line. Individual teachers respond to telephone calls, as well as email and text. Family nights have taken place, providing a focus for strengthening home school relationships and delivering support directly to families. Linking these to the food pantry has resulted in a good turnout from families. However, some families remain hard to reach and have yet to be developed into full partners in their child's education. Further, there remain opportunities for parents and community members to be more extensively engaged in aspects of decision making with the school.

Recommendations

- *Ensure that the increased focus on attendance is maintained into the coming academic year, with the personnel available to monitor and evaluate the data and follow-up with staff and families.*
- *Maintain the more strategic monitoring of student attitudes and behavior now in place. Work with teachers to implement and follow-through on the school's clearly defined conduct expectations with greater consistency.*
- *Establish the parent centre and utilize the core group of active parents in developing strategies for reaching out more extensively to harder to reach families.*

- *Develop school-wide, formalized 'safety nets' to enable students to overcome barriers preventing them from getting to school on time and making full use of the time available when there.*
- *Extend formal opportunities for parents and community members to be more involved in monitoring and evaluating the work of the school, as well as helping to establish a rigorous improvement plan.*

Comprehensive Instructional Reform

Additions to the faculty have been made in line with the SIG application and the addition of art, music and Spanish has broadened the curriculum and provided greater access to honors programs for some students. The school also works with local colleges to provide a number of higher level courses for students. Significant changes have occurred to the focus and structure of the curriculum, with more rigorous subject teaching taking place. Students, faculty and parents all recognize and welcome this change. The school has maintained key elements of the previous approach, with continued opportunities for project based learning and advisory periods. Increased collaboration between teachers is producing greater consistency within the curriculum and more direct links to the State Standards. School leaders are currently exploring how to differentiate programs for students, depending on the skills that they have developed, so as to maximize the learning potential and have programs that remain challenging, but also matched to students' needs and interests. In addition, the school recognizes that some students would benefit from greater access to vocational programs.

There is an increasing use of data to target additional support for students. READ 180 is underway, and this is supporting targeted student growth in a positive working environment. Plans are in place to broaden the range of literacy interventions available to support a greater range of learning needs. Teachers willingly give of their time outside of classes to provide individual tutoring, and the school makes extensive use of external tutors to extend this personalized support. As yet, however, there is more limited use of data to provide greater differentiation and scaffolding within the classroom.

Teachers employ a range of learning strategies in lessons, with many being student centered, although opportunities to deepen or extend learning, for example through collaborative work by students, are sometimes missed. While learning objectives are often present, they are not consistently clear and measurable. Further, checking for understanding and progress towards the objectives during and at the end of lessons is inconsistent. The result is that teachers often lack the level of information that would enable them to more accurately modify and adapt their plans as the lesson progresses. Some teachers are skilled at using strategies that require every student to be engaged intellectually throughout the lesson, although again this is variable. There is some use of technology to support learning, although access for students has not developed as outlined in the SIG application. This is due to some technical issues, but also issues such as theft from students on their way to and from school.

Some teachers have developed effective strategies for minimizing the impact of irregular student attendance, although these have yet to be developed into a formalized school-wide structure and expectation. Examples include providing individual tutoring to help students catch up, as well as organizational structures such as numbering assignments and having them all readily available. The extreme example has the teacher video the instruction and placing this, together with lesson plans and notes, available on a dedicated website. Overall, teachers do not yet share a clearly defined, faculty wide understanding of what constitutes high quality learning and how this applies to Indianapolis Metropolitan students. However, the plan for implementing TAP next academic year includes spending time in the beginning getting to know and understand the underpinning rubric. This provides an ideal opportunity to agree the vision for high quality learning.

Recommendations

- *Establish gateways for students that are clearly defined by the academic and personal skills required to be successful when accessing them.*

- *Implement a progressive, differentiated program for teaching students the skills and attitudes that underpin successful learning.*
- *Broaden the availability of vocational programs for students.*
- *Ensure that staff delivering the tiered literacy intervention program receives on-going professional development to maximize the impact of this work.*
- *Establish a coherent assessment cycle that is scheduled across the year and tied into the school's interim and final success criteria.*
- *Explore ways of using technology in the classroom to support increased student motivation and engagement, as well as checking for their understanding during lessons.*
- *Systematize strategies for minimizing the impact of irregular student attendance.*